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# New CDS and Navy Chief: Theatre Command Push Gathers Pace

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# New CDS and Navy Chief: Theatre Command Push Gathers Pace

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## WHY IN NEWS

On May 9, 2026, the Government of India announced two key military appointments. **Lieutenant General NS Raja Subramani (Retd)** will be the next **Chief of Defence Staff (CDS)** and Secretary, Department of Military Affairs. **Vice Admiral Krishna Swaminathan** will be the next **Chief of the Naval Staff (CNS)**. Both will assume office on **May 31, 2026**.

## THE APPOINTMENTS AT A GLANCE

POST	OUTGOING	INCOMING	EFFECTIVE
Chief of Defence Staff	Gen Anil Chauhan	Lt Gen NS Raja Subramani (Retd)	May 31, 2026
Chief of Naval Staff	Admiral Dinesh Kumar Tripathi	Vice Admiral Krishna Swaminathan	May 31, 2026

The CDS post is filled by **recall from retirement** – a precedent set with Gen Anil Chauhan in 2022 after the death of Gen Bipin Rawat. The rules permitting recall were notified by the Ministry of Defence in June 2022.

## THE CDS POST – STRUCTURE AND MANDATE

### Origin

The CDS post has existed since 2020 – it was **created on December 24, 2019** by the Cabinet Committee on Security (CCS), and **operationalised from January 1, 2020**, when General Bipin Rawat took office.

### Status and Rank

- **4-star officer:** equivalent to a Service Chief
- Holds the additional charge of **Secretary, Department of Military Affairs (DMA)** – a new department within the Ministry of Defence
- Reports to the Defence Minister

## Mandate

- **Principal Military Adviser** to the Defence Minister on tri-service matters (single-service matters remain with respective Chiefs)
- **Permanent Chairman** of the Chiefs of Staff Committee (replacing the rotational senior-most chief)
- Oversees **Andaman & Nicobar Command (ANC)** and **Strategic Forces Command (SFC)** – the only existing joint commands
- Drives **theaterisation** – integration of tri-service operational structures into joint theatre commands

## What the CDS Does NOT Do

- **Does not command operational troops** of the Army, Navy, or Air Force
- **Does not exercise** military command over service chiefs
- His role is **integration, jointness, and policy advice**

## THEATRE COMMAND REFORM – THE STRATEGIC STAKE

The theatre command (or “theaterisation”) project is the most significant Indian military restructuring since Independence. The CDS leads this reform.

## Envisaged Structure

- **Northern Theatre Command** – China border (Ladakh + Arunachal + the central Himalayan sector)
- **Western Theatre Command** – Pakistan border (J&K + Punjab + Rajasthan + Gujarat)
- **Maritime Theatre Command** – Indian Ocean Region (combining Western and Eastern Naval Commands)
- Possible **Air Defence Command** for integrated air defence

## Why It Matters

DIMENSION	SINGLE-SERVICE MODEL (CURRENT)	THEATRE MODEL (PROPOSED)
Command unity	Three separate chiefs, separate plans	Unified theatre commander
Resource use	Duplicated logistics and assets	Integrated logistics
Response time	Multiple HQ coordination	Single chain of command
Joint operations	Ad hoc	Institutionalised

## Outstanding Challenges

- IAF reservations on losing operational control of squadrons to a theatre commander
- Legal and constitutional questions on theatre commander's powers under the Army/Navy/Air Force Acts
- Service-specific career and promotion structures need reform

## THE INCOMING NAVY CHIEF – CONTEXT

Vice Admiral **Krishna Swaminathan** brings an operational and strategic background relevant to:

- The **Indian Ocean Region (IOR)** security posture
- Ongoing **submarine modernisation** (Project-75I conventional submarine; Project-75 Alpha SSN)
- **Carrier programme**: INS Vikrant operational since 2022; second indigenous aircraft carrier under planning (IAC-2)
- Maritime engagement with **QUAD partners** and **Indian Ocean Naval Symposium (IONS)** members

## INDIA'S HIGHER DEFENCE ORGANISATION – QUICK MAP

President of India (Supreme Commander)

|

Cabinet Committee on Security (CCS) -- PM, RM, HM, EAM, FM

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Defence Minister

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+-- Department of Defence (DoD)

+-- Department of Defence Production (DDP)

+-- Department of Defence R&D (DRDO)

+-- Department of Ex-Servicemen Welfare (DESW)

+-- Department of Military Affairs (DMA) <-- headed by CDS

|

+-- Three Service HQs: IHQ-Army, IHQ-Navy, IHQ-Air

+-- Chiefs of Staff Committee (CDS = permanent chairman)

+-- Tri-Service Joint Commands: ANC, SFC

## UPSC RELEVANCE

### GS Paper 3 – Internal Security and Defence

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- CDS post: structure, mandate, limits
- Theaterisation and integrated commands
- Department of Military Affairs (DMA)
- Higher defence organisation

### GS Paper 2 – Polity and Governance

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- Civilian control of armed forces
- Cabinet Committee on Security (CCS)
- Federal vs. unified command issues

### Mains Angles

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- 1 Examine how the CDS post has reshaped India's higher defence organisation.
  - 2 Discuss the challenges in implementing theatre commands in India.
  - 3 Should India have a Permanent Chairman, Chiefs of Staff Committee, instead of CDS-as-Secretary DMA? Compare with US Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff (CJCS).
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**FACTS CORNER – KNOWLEDGEPEDIA**
**CDS POST:**

Created Dec 24, 2019 (CCS); operationalised Jan 1, 2020

First CDS, in office since 2020: Gen Bipin Rawat (Jan 1, 2020 to Dec 8, 2021)

Second CDS: Gen Anil Chauhan (Sept 30, 2022 – May 31, 2026)

Third CDS (announced): Lt Gen NS Raja Subramani (Retd), from May 31, 2026

Recall from retirement: enabled by MoD rules notified June 2022

4-star rank; Secretary, DMA; Permanent Chairman, COSC

Does NOT command operational troops

**CHIEF OF NAVAL STAFF (ANNOUNCED):**

Vice Admiral Krishna Swaminathan, effective May 31, 2026

Outgoing: Admiral Dinesh Kumar Tripathi

**JOINT COMMANDS (EXISTING):**

Andaman & Nicobar Command (ANC) – created 2001

Strategic Forces Command (SFC) – created 2003

**THEATRE COMMANDS ENVISAGED:**

Northern (China), Western (Pakistan), Maritime; possible Air Defence Command

**CCS: PM, DEFENCE MINISTER, HOME MINISTER, EAM, FINANCE MINISTER**

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